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ABSTRACT

This article attempts to identify the nature and the magnitude of Indiana commercial needs for foreign languages, and to determine how companies have coped thus far with such needs. These features are reflected in six tables, showing use of foreign languages, distribution of foreign language use by form and type, nature of international operations, attitude toward languages, handling of translation problems, and companies' willingness to take advantage of Indiana University's expertise if made available to them. The statistics contained in these tables are discussed.
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EXPANDING ABROAD? HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT LANGUAGES?

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Indiana's 1973 exports of manufactured and agricultural products amounted to a dollar volume of two billion and ranked eighth in the U.S. This international trade currently accounts for approximately 180,000 jobs in Indiana. In the context of a rapidly expanding international trade, foreign languages may turn out to be a key factor in future communication between an Indiana company and its foreign business contacts. This article will try to identify the nature and the magnitude of the needs for languages, and then to find out how companies have, so far, coped with these needs.

A foreign language questionnaire sponsored by the Indiana Department of Commerce and the Indiana University Department of International Business was sent to two hundred firms out of the six hundred listed in the Indiana International Trade Directory. The authors assigned a number of questionnaires to a particular industry according to its relative importance in international trade, keeping as broad a geographical distribution as possible. Within each industry, companies employing from fifty to five thousand people were selected at random. Thirty-one percent of the selected companies responded to the survey. The results help to gauge the extent of the language problems usually faced by companies in their international operations.

The languages mentioned in the responses are listed in Table I in order of importance. The importance was judged by two criteria: (a) the frequency of appearance; and (b) the relative frequency of use of each language within the company. The language in most frequent use was given the weight 5, the second 4 and so on. The ranking by weighted importance is essentially the same as by frequency.

[Table 1 Here]

Table 2 shows that written expression (64%), of which letters are the dominant component (94%), is the most common form of communication, and the main subjects concern business or economics.

[Table 2 Here]

Most firms handle their business in English, but half of them are aware of potential improvements through more extensive use of foreign languages (Table 4). Detailed analysis of the responses showed that the types of operation conducted abroad (Table 5) are not independent of the policy adopted by a firm regarding languages.

[Table 3 Here]

[Table 4 Here]

40% of the companies used outside translators (Table 5). The remaining 60% have one of the two following characteristics:

1. Their operations abroad are small, and they have on their staff somebody who can speak the language (with all the possible mistakes generated by a non-professional translator).
2. Their operations abroad are so important they develop their own translation force.

One surprising discovery was that translation services, internal or external, were often unavailable.

[Table 5 Here]

The low demand for Arabic (see Table 1) is one example of the influence of linguistic barriers on the trade opportunity. Middle Eastern countries have rising purchasing power owing to their oil resources; however, only 1% of the surveyed companies show an interest in Arabic. Trade opportunities are good, but the lack of people fluent in Arabic presents complete market penetration.

The organizational material involved in implanting a subsidiary abroad or setting up a joint venture usually requires the utilization of a foreign language. If a company cannot rely upon its translation expertise, the language requirement becomes a major obstacle to its project. Thus, the results of this survey are related to the changing linguistic environment of the firm, which at present may be a constraining factor in the development of international trade in Indiana.

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TABLE 1
USE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Languages	Frequency of Appearance		Weighted Importance
	No.	%	
1 Spanish	33	29%	147
2 French	28	24%	119
3 German	28	24%	105
4 Italian	7	6%	21
5 Portuguese	6	5%	21
6 Japanese	6	5%	17
7 Russian	2	2%	5
8 Indonesian	1	1%	4
9 Turkish	1	1%	3
9 Arabic	1	1%	3
9 Flemish	1	1%	3
9 Yugoslavian	1	1%	3

TABLE 2

DISTRIBUTION OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES USE BY FORM AND TYPE

Present Use of Foreign Languages Assessed in Terms OfFormORAL 36%

	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
Telephone	8	35
Personal Contact	<u>15</u>	<u>65</u>
TOTAL ORAL	23	100

WRITTEN 64%

	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
Pamphlet	4	10
Letters	<u>37</u>	<u>90</u>
TOTAL WRITTEN	41	100

Type

	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
Business	32	46
Economic	5	7
Law	3	4
Engineering	12	17
Technical	<u>18</u>	<u>26</u>
TOTAL	70	100

TABLE 3

NATURE OF INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS CONDUCTED BY SURVEYED FIRMS

Nature of Foreign Operations	No.	%
Agent/Distributor	29	43%
Subsidiary	10	15%
License	8	12%
Joint Venture	3	4%
Others	17	26%
	—	—
	67	100%

TABLE 4
ATTITUDE TOWARDS LANGUAGES

<u>Involvement in Languages</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
- Firms handling part of their business in a foreign language	13	25%
- Firms handling all their business in English	39	75%
	—	—
TOTAL	52	100%
<u>Interest in Languages</u>		
- Foreign languages perceived as a possible improvement of the firm's business	26	50%
- Foreign languages not perceived as a possible improvement of the firm's business	24	50%
	—	—
TOTAL	50	100%

TABLE 5
HANDLING TRANSLATION PROBLEMS

Translation	Translation problems handled	within the company	60%
		outside the company	<u>40%</u>
		TOTAL	100%
	Cost of Translation	Figure available	40%
		Figure not available	<u>60%</u>
		TOTAL	100%

TABLE 6
COMPANIES' WILLINGNESS TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF I.U.'S EXPERTISE
IF MADE AVAILABLE TO THEM

Interested	54%
Eventually Interested	12%
Not Interested	<u>34%</u>
TOTAL	100%